

HISTORICAL PLAY

Rain of Ruin

by Catherine Gourley

They had survived
the atomic blast,
but could they
survive humiliation
and heartbreak?

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FIRST ATOMIC BOMB DROPPED ON
MISSILE IS EQUAL FOE OF A RAIN
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THIRD CITY EDITION

JAPAN;
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OF RUIN

NEW AGE USHERED

Characters

(Main parts in bold face)

Narrators 1, 2
Callhoun, American prisoner
of war in Hiroshima
Akiran
Hiroko (shi-ROH-koh), 16
Sensei, a Japanese teacher
Araki (ah-RAH-kee), 13
Shigeo (shi-GAY-koh), 13
Soldier, Japanese soldier
Captain Graham
President Harry Truman
Mother, Shigeo's mother
Father, Shigeo's father
Japanese Guard
Lieutenant Cartwright, 9
P.O.W.
Sister
American Officer
Children
Boys 1, 2

Scene 1

Narrator 1: At 6 o'clock on a hot August morning, air-raid sirens begin to wail. The sudden shrieking is a familiar sound to the people who live in Hiroshima, a city on the western coast of Japan.

Narrator 2: The wailing wakes Shigeko. So many times, the sirens have sounded false alarms. Only once during the war has her city been bombed. Still, she and her family take shelter.

Narr 1: Miles away in Hiroshima Castle, ten American airmen sit motionless on the wooden floor of a cramped cell. They are forbidden to move or to talk.

Narr 2: They are the crew of the *Lonesome Lady*, a B-24 bomber. A week ago, they flew out of Okinawa on a mission to sink the Japanese battleship *Haruna*, in port near Hiroshima.

Narr 1: But their plane was hit, forcing the crew to bail out. Now, five days later, they are imprisoned in the ancient castle. The youngest is Calhoun, just 21. The wailing sirens make him nervous. He cannot remain silent any longer.

Calhoun: (*whispering*) Where did they take the lieutenant?

Airman: Don't worry about Cartwright. Worry about yourself.

Calhoun: They'll bring him back, won't they?

Narr 2: The airman doesn't answer.

Narr 1: As suddenly as they began, the air-raid sirens quit. In her home, Hiroko sighs with relief.

Hiroko: Another false alarm.

Narr 2: Today, Hiroko, Shigeko, and their classmates will help prepare for the expected American invasion.

Young people are building fire lanes in the center of the city.

Narr 1: By 8 a.m., the all clear sounds.

It is a bright, blue-sky morning. Sensei is with her students. She gives Hiroko a pair of white gloves.

Sensei: Put these on to protect your hands from the rough stones.

Araki: If Japan is winning the war, why are we preparing for an invasion?

Shigeko: Be silent! Do not speak such traitorous words. Someone will turn you in.

Hiroko: In 2,000 years, Japan has never been invaded. This is the land of the gods, and the emperor is one of them. He will protect us.

Narr 2: But just then she hears the sound of a plane. She looks up.

Hiroko: Look! *B-chan*.*

Shigeko: Where? I can't see it.

Narr 1: Shigeko uses her ungloved hands as a visor.

Shigeko: Ah, there! It looks like a bird with a silver tail.

Araki: Something has dropped from the *B-chan*.

Narr 2: Shigeko, still holding her hands to shade her eyes, thinks she sees an object falling.

Narr 1: Across town, Shigeko's father also sees the plane. He shouts to the people around him.

Father: Run! It is a bomb!

Narr 2: He dives behind a concrete wall a second before a searing white flash ignites the air above Hiroshima.

Narr 1: The flash blinds the children who are looking up. A violent wind slams Hiroko backward and hurls Shigeko and Araki through the air.

Narr 2: Roaring thunder rolls across the land, and then . . . there is no sound at all.

*a bomber

Scene 2

Hiroko: (*moaning*) I have been shot.

Narr 1: The air is black and red, more night than day. In the dark haze, an old man appears. His long beard and loose robes are flowing.

Hiroko: Please. Help me. I'm shot.

Narr 2: He points a crooked finger in the direction she should go. Hiroko looks through the smoke.

Narr 1: People are stumbling with their arms held out in front of them. Hiroko looks again at the old man, but he has vanished in the smoke.

Narr 2: Shigeko hears a baby screaming. She looks all around.

Shigeko: (*dazed*) Where are the houses? Where are the buildings?

Narr 1: Shigeko can see in a straight line all the way to the river. She hears her name and turns. The face staring at her is black and swollen. The skin is shredded.

Shigeko: (*frightened*) Who are you?

Araki: It's me, Araki.

Narr 2: But Shigeko does not recognize her friends' burned face.

Araki: (*frightened*) Do I look so bad?

Shigeko: (*lying*) No, it is only slight.

Narr 1: An arm pulls at Shigeko, urging her to follow the others to the river. Araki does not go.

Araki: I must find my mother.

Narr 2: The Ota River smolders in an eerie ash-fog. Hiroko slides down the bank and into the cool current. The water rises to her shoulder.

ders, easing the pain of her charred skin.

Sensei: (*shouting*) The city is not safe! We must get back to the school.

Hiroko: Sensei? Is that you?

Narr 1: Hiroko stares. Sensei's clothes are smoking rags that look as if they are about to burst into flames.

Sensei: The whole city is destroyed! Come, come!

Shigeko: Sensei! What does my face look like?

Sensei: (*turning away*) We all look the same.

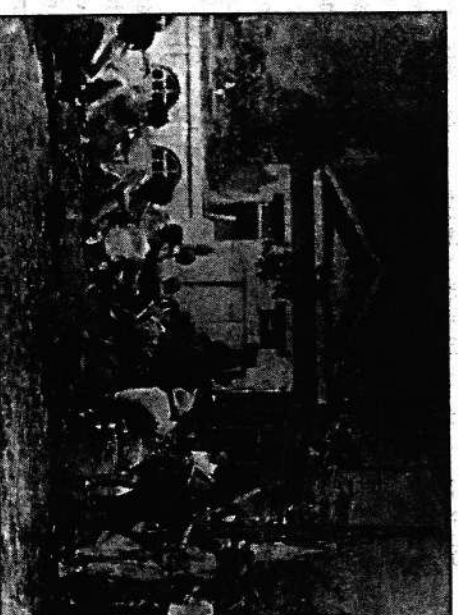
Narr 2: More shrieking people stumble to the river, pushing their way into the muddy water.

Narr 1: Hiroko and Shigeko both fight their way back to the bank, following their Sensei. The school is on a hill, but flattened buildings and burning rubble block the way.

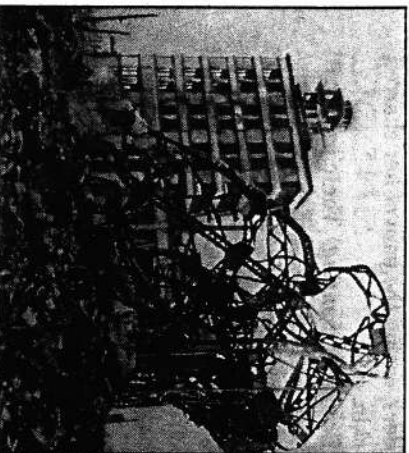
Narr 2: People are rushing in every direction. Hiroko falls. Shigeko tries to help Hiroko stand, but the frightened crowd drives her forward.

Shigeko: Help her! Someone help.

Narr 1: Caught in the current of



As Hiroshima burns, soldiers and civilians huddle in shock in the streets.



Twisted, melted metal and concrete shells of buildings show the bomb's power.

burned bodies, Shigeo is separated from Hiroko.

Narr 2: Outside the school, Shigeo's strength gives out. She collapses. A steady black rain is falling. Shigeo does not know the rain is radioactive. All she knows is that it is cool on her burned flesh. She closes her eyes.

Soldier: Who are you?

Narr 1: She feels herself being lifted and carried inside the school.

Shigeo: I am so thirsty. Please, give me something to drink.

Soldier: What is your name?

Shigeo: Shigeo. Tell my parents I am here. I am Shigeo.

Narr 2: He drizzles a bit of water over the girl's black lips..

Narr 1: For hours, Hiroko lies on the ground as others stumble past her. Through swollen slits, she watches the afternoon sun sink into a curtain of purple smoke rising over Hiroshima.

Scene 3

Narr 2: Thousands of miles away, on an American ship in the North Atlantic, Captain Graham decodes a

top-secret message.

Narr 1: Aboard ship is the president of the United States, Harry Truman. Captain Graham immediately delivers the message to him.

Captain Graham: Sir, Hiroshima was bombed at 7:15 p.m. Washington time.

Narr 2: The president turns. His face is hopeful.

President Truman: With what results?

Graham: (reading message) Clearcut success in all respects.

Truman: So! We won the gamble.

Graham: Gamble, sir?

Truman: We have just harnessed the power of the sun. Thank God it came to us first and not to them.

Narr 1: Excited, he grabs Graham's hand.

Truman: Do you know what I read between these lines, Captain?

Graham: No, sir.

Truman: The end of the war! Do you realize how many hundreds of thousands of American lives we have saved with one bomb?

Narr 2: Hours later, the president delivers his radio broadcast to the American people.

Truman: Sixteen hours ago, an American airplane dropped one bomb on Hiroshima. It was an atomic bomb.

Narr 1: He ends with a grim warning, knowing that the Japanese are also listening.

Truman: We shall destroy their docks, their factories, and their communications. Let there be no mistake; we shall completely destroy Japan's power to make war. If the Japanese do not now accept our terms of unconditional surrender, they may expect a rain of ruin from the air, the like of which has never been seen on Earth.

Scene 4

Father: You cannot go out again. It is not safe.

Narr 2: Two days have passed. The black rain continues to fall. What once was a city is now a wilderness of rubble and ash.

Mother: My daughter is alive. I must find her.

Father: She was in the city with the other children.

Narr 1: Shigeo's father was not burned by the blast. The concrete wall saved him. Still, the poisonous radiation is in the air and in the rain.

Father: Do not go out again. You have other daughters who need you. You'll get the sickness if you go. If she is alive, they will bring her to us.

Narr 2: The mother nods obediently. But later that day . . .

Narr 1: She sneaks out of the house and descends into the ashes again.

Narr 2: The flimsy wooden houses have collapsed or burned. Even the five-story Hiroshima Castle, which had overlooked the city for hundreds of years, is now a charred shell.

Narr 1: Bodies lie twisted where they fell at the moment of the flash. The summer heat and flies and smell are horrible, but the mother does not turn back.

Mother: Shigeo, where are you?

Scene 5

Narr 2: In the fog of unconsciousness, the girls dream.

Narr 1: Hiroko dreams of a school day in December 1941. Suddenly, Sensei interrupts the lesson.

Sensei: (in Hiroko's dream) I have just learned that Japan is at war with America. You are to go home at

once and listen to the radio news. The emperor says all children of Japan must prepare themselves for the future.

Hiroko: (dreaming) For two days, my family and I listen to the radio. I cannot believe we have attacked a country so rich and so far away. I feel as if a fire is burning inside me, as if my skin is all flames.

Narr 2: Shigeo also dreams, but of water not fire. She sees fountains and oceans of water—blue and clear.

Shigeo: I am thirsty. Please give me something to drink. I am Shigeo. . .

Narr 1: In the auditorium of the school where hundreds of burned survivors are being nursed, the soldier drizzles a bit more water on Hiroko's lips, then on Shigeo's.

Soldier: This one has a strong heart. She keeps saying her name.

Sensei: Will she live?

Soldier: I don't know.

Scene 6

Narr 2: At a military base near Tokyo, a Japanese guard knocks the blindfolded Lieutenant Cartwright to his knees.

Narr 1: Cartwright's hands are bound behind him. His face is bruised and swollen. The guard removes the blindfold. Standing before Cartwright is a Japanese officer.

Cartwright: What has happened to my men? Where are they?

Officer: (sharply) You speak only when I address you.

Narr 2: The officer nods to the guard, who withdraws a sword from its sheath.

Officer: What is this new kind of bomb? Cartwright: I don't know what you're talking about.

Officer: Your president says it is an atomic bomb. That is ridiculous. Americans do not have the knowledge to make such a bomb.

Cartwright: I wouldn't know.

Narr 1: The guard raises the sword.

Officer: This is your last chance to save your head. How many bombs are there?

Narr 2: Cartwright knows nothing about an atomic bomb. And if he did, he would tell them nothing.

Cartwright: Get lost!

Narr 1: The officer stares violently at Cartwright's bowed head. The guard grips the hilt of the sword.

Narr 2: Cartwright closes his eyes, expecting the blow. . . .

Narr 1: But the officer turns away.

Officer: Take him back to his cell.

Scene 7

Mother: Shigeko?

Narr 2: She tries to answer, but her voice is a squeak.

Shigeko: Here. I'm here!

Narr 1: Shigeko's mother stares at the child lying on the floor. Shigeko's eyes were dark and pretty. Her cheeks were smooth. Her hair was blue-black and shiny. But this child. . . .

Narr 2: She puts her head on Shigeko's chest and listens to her heart.

Soldier: She is alive. She has been crying for you.

Narr 1: Once more they lift Shigeko and carry her, this time along the river and into the hills to her home. Her home has not been destroyed by the bomb.

Narr 2: On the third day also, a cousin finds Hiroko.

Narr 1: Hiroko uses her fingers to open her burned eyelids. She tries to smile at her cousin.

Hiroko: Oranges. Please, give me an orange to eat.

Scene 8

Narr 2: Ten days have passed. The Japanese have argued among themselves. Defeat is unthinkable!

Narr 1: But at last, the emperor surrenders.

Narr 2: The war is not over for Shigeko, though. Her skin has turned black and flakes like burned paper.

Narr 1: Her mother and sister take turns fanning away the summer flies, keeping them from laying eggs in her raw flesh.

Narr 2: Her father removes all mirrors from the house.

Narr 1: In an adjoining room, Shigeko's sister whispers.

Sister: Poor Shigeko. She used to be so pretty. No man will ever marry her now.

Father: Sssh. She is still your sister. She cannot help that you were safe in the mountains while she was in the city.

Narr 2: Shigeko looks at her hands. When she held them up to shade her eyes, they caught the full blast of the radiation. Now they are bent back at the wrists. Her fingers are claws.

Shigeko: What terrible thing have I done to deserve this?

Scene 9

Narr 1: By October, the victors have occupied Japan. Children run after American soldiers, begging for chewing gum.

Narr 2: With the soldiers come reporters. Despite the military's efforts to control what the reporters write, word about the horrors of the

bomb's effects leak out.

Narr 1: In Tokyo, Lieutenant Cartwright has been liberated from his captors and is being debriefed at American headquarters.

Cartwright: Right after our bombs sunk the *Haruna*, the *Lonesome Lady* caught anti-aircraft fire and went down. I gave the order to bail out.

American officer: And you were captured?

Cartwright: I turned myself in.

American: Then what happened?

Cartwright: They already had my copilot. They tied us up in a public square for a day so the people could curse and spit on us. Then they took us to Hiroshima Castle.

American: Then you and your men were taken from Hiroshima?

Cartwright: No. They took only me to someplace near Tokyo for interrogation. Officer, what's happened to my crew?

American: We have recovered the bodies of six American soldiers who were victims of Japanese medical experiments.

Cartwright: (emphatically) Those aren't my men. The last time I saw the crew of the *Lonesome Lady*, they were still locked inside that castle.

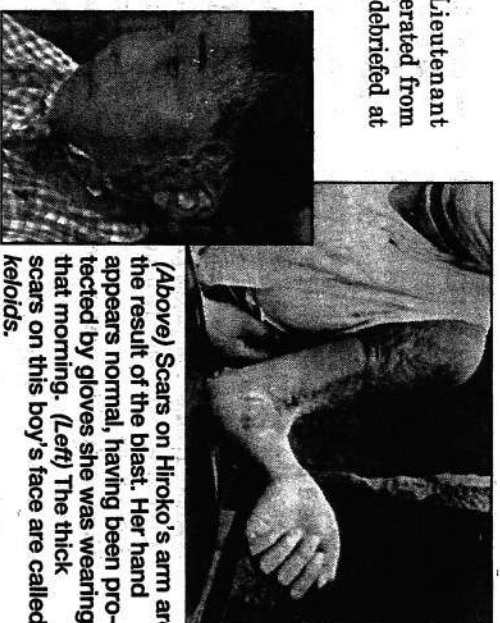
Narr 2: The two soldiers stare at each other.

Cartwright: They're dead, aren't they?

Narr 1: Shaken, Cartwright slumps in his chair and covers his eyes.

Scene 10

Narr 2: In the winter, children



(Above) Scars on Hiroko's arm are the result of the blast. Her hand appears normal, having been protected by gloves she was wearing that morning. (Left) The thick scars on this boy's face are called keloids.

orphaned by the bomb live in the streets, begging and stealing food. Some chase Shigeko. It is her first day outside.

Children: Gum! Give us gum!

Sister: Go away! Leave her alone!

Shigeko: They think I am American? Sister: Your face. It is pink, like the faces of the Americans.

Narr 1: The children laugh at Shigeko but are also afraid of her.

Children: *Pikadon!* ** Pikadon!*

Sister: Don't call her that! It could have been you!

Narr 2: Shigeko runs away from the children. Her sister follows. Shigeko huddles near the stump of a cherry tree.

Narr 1: The bark is black; the branches, bare. Like Shigeko, the tree was burned by the thermal fires of the bomb but still stands, charred and grotesque.

Shigeko: (sobbing) I am a monster. I am ugly.

Sister: No! You are still my sister.

Shigeko: Why are there no mirrors

* *Pika* means "flash"; *don* means "explosion." *Pikadon* became slang for atomic blast.

in the house? What don't you want me to see?

Sister: (*lowering her eyes*) We must go back. Mother will worry.

Narr 2: On the ground, Shigeo spies a piece of glass from a broken bottle. She quickly scoops it up and hides it in her sleeve.

Narr 1: At home, she waits until she is alone. Then she slips the glass out of her sleeve and slowly bends over it. She gasps.

Shigeo: No! This can't be me! No!

Narr 2: She sees now what the others have seen: the pink, scarred skin, the twisted mouth without lips, and worst of all, the chin that has melted into her neck.

Mother: What are you doing?

Narr 1: Startled, the girl drops the glass. The mother looks at it, then at her disfigured child.

Mother: The burns are still healing. It is not permanent.

Narr 2: Shigeo remembers how she lied to her friend Araki on the day of the bomb.

Mother: I told your sister not to let you go outside. It is too soon.

Shigeo: I didn't do anything bad. Why should I hide in here?

Narr 1: But they both know why. The scars will thicken. They will never go away. Like others with deformities, Shigeo will be mocked and shunned.

Shigeo: I wish I were dead! I wish you'd never found me!

Narr 2: She curls into a tight ball on the floor, rocking herself as she cries. Her father enters.

Narr 1: He stands over her. It is not the Japanese way to cradle a daughter as if she were a baby.

Father: You must be brave, Shigeo. You are a soldier who has been

wounded for her country.

Shigeo: I don't want to be a soldier! I want to be Shigeo.

Father: You are still Shigeo, only stronger now. Feel your strength in your heart.

Scene 11

Narr 2: Throughout the winter, rumors swirl about Hiroshima. People say that nothing will grow for 40 years because of the black rain.

Narr 1: But then spring comes, and slowly the earth begins to heal itself. Grass is green again. The sky is blue.

Narr 2: Hiroko covers the lower half of her face with a red scarf so no one will see the thick, ugly scars.

Narr 1: She has a job. The others in her office avoid her. They call her "red monster." She wonders where the gods and the emperor who have protected Japan for thousands of years have gone.

Narr 2: On a spring morning, Shigeo also steps outside, but she does not hide behind a scarf. She breathes the air and remembers other springs before the "rain of ruin" contaminated her.

Mother: Where are you going?

Narr 1: She cannot go to school. She cannot hold a pencil in her twisted hands. Many of her friends have died, even Araki.

Father: Let her go. She has a strong heart. She must learn to face the world as she is.

Narr 2: As Shigeo walks along the street, others who are not *hibakusha*—victims of the atomic blast—lower their eyes to avoid seeing the ugliness the bomb has left on her face.

Boy 1: Look at her. She looks like a monkey, doesn't she?

Boy 2: I wouldn't have her for my wife if they gave me a million yen.

Narr 1: Shigeo stops. She swallows hard, trying to find the strength her father said was in her heart.

Shigeo: (*to herself*) I am not like them. I am different. I am stronger.

Narr 2: But her legs feel weak.

Boy 1: Go away, *Pikadori*! *Hibakusha*!

Boy 2: Monkey girl!

Narr 1: Bitterness mushrooms inside her. She wants to scream, to beat her twisted claws against their laughing faces.

Shigeo: I hate you! I hate you! I—

Narr 2: Suddenly, she sees something wonderful, something so unexpected, it smotheres the hate and fills her heart with hope.

Narr 1: Before her is the cherry tree. The bark is still black, but amazingly its charred limbs are full now of fragrant pink blossoms.

Shigeo: The tree is not dead! It has come back to life!

Narr 2: She steps forward into the sound of the boys' mocking laughter. They hush as she passes.

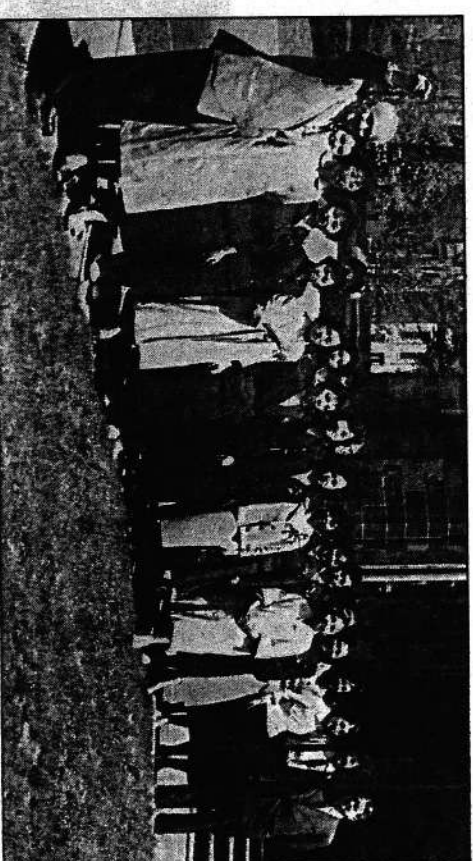
Narr 1: Shigeo lifts her head.

Shigeo: (*elated*) I am alive!

Narr 2: A soft wind stirs, and a shower of cherry-blossom petals whips against her face. ■

End Note: What happened to the characters in this play? In 1954, both Hiroko and Shigeo were among 25 women, known as "the Hiroshima Maidens," who traveled to the United States for plastic surgery. The trip and their surgery were paid for by the U.S. government. The surgery lessened but did not eliminate their crippling scars. Shigeo eventually moved to the United States permanently.

In 1949, the U.S. Army buried a casket containing the mingled ashes of several American soldiers killed in Hiroshima. On the tombstone are the names of eight men, including five crewmen of the *Lonesome Lady*. Though the date of death is recorded—August 6, 1945—the place of death is not identified. Lieutenant Cartwright became a professor at Texas A&M University.



In the United States in 1954, "the Hiroshima Maidens" were the focus of much publicity. Here they pose for photographers in New York City.